

Mozambique

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Freedom of the Press

The environment for media freedom worsened in 2013, primarily due to an increase in attacks and detentions of journalists by both security forces and nonstate actors, as well as the firing of editors whose coverage was deemed overly critical of the government.

Mozambique's revised 2004 constitution guarantees freedom of the press, explicitly protecting journalists and granting them the right to not reveal their sources. However, the 1991 Press Law contains some limitations on these rights, particularly on national security grounds. In addition, defamation of the president or other high-ranking officials is illegal, and general criminal libel and defamation laws deter journalists from writing freely. Libel and defamation cases, which are common, can lead to fines, prison terms of up to two years, and suspension of the media outlet in question. In December 2013, *Mediafax* editor Fernando Mbanze and *Canal de Moçambique* editor Fernando Veloso were called in to the Maputo attorney general's office for questioning after publishing an open letter by academic and researcher Carlos Nuno Castel-Branco that criticized President Armando Guebuza. Castel-Branco, who originally posted the letter to his Facebook page, is facing criminal charges for insulting the head of state. In May, John Chekwa, the coordinator of Catandica Community Radio, was cleared of wrongdoing after broadcasting a story accusing the agricultural company Nzara Yapera of selling defective seeds to local farmers.

Journalists face difficulties accessing public information and official documents. The local chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) presented a draft freedom of information bill to the parliament in 2005, but despite moves in recent years to debate the measure, no further legislative action was taken in 2013, a source of continuing consternation for media activists.

The current regulatory framework for media, administered by the Government Information Bureau, is in need of updating and vulnerable to political influence. In particular, there is an urgent need for a legal framework regulating broadcast media. Mozambique's press law almost exclusively addresses print outlets, creating a troubling legal vacuum. According to MISA, radio stations are subjected to overly bureaucratic procedures to obtain operating licenses. However, there is also an independent media regulatory body, the Supreme Mass Media Council, which is tasked with guaranteeing press freedom and the public's right to information. Bloggers and community radio or newspaper journalists, who often work on a voluntary or part-time basis, may not be equally protected under Mozambican press laws, though this has yet to be tested in a court case.

Political interference into media content occurs occasionally, and this increased in 2013, with several cases of politically motivated appointments or dismissals of editors. Critics of the government expressed concern when Jeremias Langa, editorial director of the independent daily *O País* and the independent television station STV, and Rogerio Siteo, editor of the state-owned daily *Notícias*, were dismissed in September and July, respectively, after their news organizations came under fire for being too critical of Guebuza's government. In addition, the *Notícias* website was subsequently redesigned to make it more difficult to find articles from Siteo's tenure.

A number of websites have posted criticisms of the government without encountering censorship, but there have been reports of government intelligence agents monitoring the e-mail of members of opposition political parties. Self-censorship by journalists is pervasive, especially in rural areas outside the capital.

Independent media often release potentially sensitive stories at the same time in an effort to counter self-censorship and deter reprisals from the government.

After a brief reprieve in 2012, there was an increase in attacks, harassment, and intimidation of journalists in 2013. The rearming of the opposition Renamo party—former rebels during the country’s civil war—and its renewed campaign of attacks on government forces and civilians put many journalists reporting on the conflict at risk. In July, Malawian journalist Bright Sonjela of Rádio Moçambique was seriously injured in an attack by Renamo militants while investigating a previous Renamo attack on a family of Malawian tenant farmers residing in Mozambique. Other incidents were unrelated to the conflict, and many involve journalists being harassed or detained by local police or security forces. In early November, while covering a land dispute between the army and local residents near a military barracks in Matola, a city close to Maputo, journalist Alexandre Rosa and cameraman José Claudio Timana of Televisão Independente de Moçambique (TIM) were attacked by soldiers from the barracks. Rosa was severely beaten, losing consciousness and requiring hospitalization, while Timana was illegally detained for several hours before being released. Later that month, veteran reporter Fernando Lima of the independent weekly *Savana* and Antonio Munaita of *Diário de Zambezia*, were illegally detained in Mocuba for four hours for allegedly campaigning for the opposition Movimento Democrático de Moçambique outside the legal campaign period for the local elections. No journalists were killed in Mozambique in 2013, though the year was marked by the early release from prison of Vicente Ramaya, one of the men convicted of the 2001 assassination of investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso, who was known for his exposés of high-level public corruption and embezzlement.

Although progress has been made in the development of a strong and free press in Mozambique, the country continues to be dominated by state-controlled media outlets. Independent media are often underfunded and are generally found only in major cities, with the government employing pressure to restrict advertising in independent outlets. The state-run television station, Televisão de Moçambique (TVM), is still the only domestic television channel with nationwide reach and has the largest audience. The state provides about 70 percent of the station’s operating budget, and news reporting from TVM is often biased in favor of the government, offering little opportunity for the political opposition to weigh in. The private channel Soico TV, Portuguese state television’s African service (RTP Africa), and Brazilian-owned TV Miramar also have large audiences.

Radio continues to be a key source of information for the majority of Mozambicans. Compared with television, there is far more opportunity for private radio stations to open and operate. Numerous private FM stations are based in rural areas and broadcast to small audiences. Many of the 70 community stations currently operating were started by and receive their funding from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or other international aid organizations, but they face serious problems of management and sustainability, as they rely on volunteers. Despite the prevalence of privately owned radio stations, state-run Rádio Moçambique has the largest audience and is by far the most influential media outlet in the country, offering programming in at least 18 languages. Rádio Moçambique receives about 50 percent of its operating budget from the government. While the station is known for presenting critical political debates and policy issues on its broadcasts, it most frequently invites guests who are sympathetic to the government. Community radio stations may also be vulnerable to local political pressures.

Newspapers and print media in general have a far smaller audience than both radio and television. This is mainly because the print media are published only in Portuguese, which is spoken by about 11 percent of the population. The high cost of newspapers relative to average incomes, as well as poor distribution networks and a 44 percent illiteracy rate, also contribute to low readership. The government has a majority stake in *Notícias*, the most-read daily newspaper in the country, which rarely prints stories critical of the government, while *O País* is the leader of the four private newspapers. *@Verdade*, which offers a mixed

platform of print, online, and mobile publishing, is growing rapidly. Import taxes on newsprint remain steep, leading to high production costs for newspapers.

The largest source of advertising revenue for local media comes from government ministries and businesses under state control, and some journalists have accused the government and ruling party of allocating advertising according to political concerns and of favoring friendly outlets.

Internet access is unrestricted, but penetration is low. About 5.4 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2013, and most usage is confined to major cities. New media and mobile phones are proving useful, however, in increasing access to information and accountability. During local elections in November, for example, *@Verdade* used crowd sourcing via SMS and social-media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to generate stories.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Partly Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

45

Legal Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

13

Political Environment

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

17

Economic Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

15